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City of Dublin Launches First Phase of Wireless Project

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By TERRY WOLF

In spite of Wednesday's gusty winds and afternoon temperatures only in the 40s, Dublin officially became a hot spot as the city launched its free Wi-Fi outdoor internet connections.

The ceremonial ribbon cutting was replaced by a more appropriate wire cutting as about 50 supporters huddled in cold winds to applaud Phase One of Dublin's Wireless Project.

"I think it's wonderful what this can bring to Dublin," said Mayor Phil Best. "We're hoping it will help grow business development."

The symbolic ceremony comes nearly two months after the city actually flipped the switch in a "soft test" of the Wi-Fi service.

"On January 10 we turned on the system without announcing it, just to see if anyone found it," said Guy Mullis, a technical analyst with the City of Dublin. "Between then and now, there have actually been 22 people using the system at the same time."

Mullis said in Phase One, all of downtown and part of Southside should have Wi-Fi outdoor internet connections. Phases Two and Three, which should be complete by 2009, will provide wireless access network to about 40 percent of the city.

"Anyone with a laptop or hand held device should look for the signal 'DTFreeWiFi' in order to access the service," said Mullis.

City Manager George Roussel said back in 1997, former city councilman Wiley Stuckey first saw the benefits of making Dublin a digital community. Stuckey pushed for the city's fiber optics network to benefit municipal services and the area's school systems.

From there, Roussel said the project moved from dream to reality when Dublin was selected as one of six communities to receive grants from the state under a \$4 million Wireless Communities Georgia program managed by the GTA (Georgia Technology Authority). The other municipalities are Augusta, Decatur, Gwinnett, Milledgeville/Baldwin County, and Thomasville.

Dublin received a \$318,750 GTA grant toward start-up costs in 2006. The city matched the funds with a \$159,375 grant.

On hand for the wire cutting was Rich Calhoun, GTA's Wireless Project director, who said his office thought the City of Dublin's application for the grant was compelling.

"We're looking forward to being here to support you and the City of Dublin as you move forward," said Calhoun.

The goals of the program, Calhoun explained, are to promote economic development, expand educational opportunities, and improve government services.

"From here we hope to soon make it so that the police can use laptops in their cruisers and not have to go back to the station," said Mayor Best.

Chief Wayne Cain said having Wi-Fi will be a "win situation" for Dublin's police force.

"In the past, we had to use pencils to complete paperwork and drive it back to the station," said Cain. "From there we began using laptops, but they had to copy their reports to a floppy and go back to the police department to download it."

"Now they can do their reports and access information by going to a hot spot and send it directly to the station, allowing them to stay on the road, be visible in the community and do their job," Cain explained.

Mullis said other city services that rely on wireless technology, such as the water department, could incorporate the wireless network into the city's utility monitoring system and replace dedicated phone lines currently in use, thereby saving the city as much as \$2,000 monthly.

The Dublin Wi-Fi Project will be managed by Alterra Network Consulting.